

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Working Group Background and Terms of References

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) was founded in 1998 to coordinate at a global level Internet naming and numbering resources. Through its Global Partnerships team (became Global Stakeholder Engagement in a recent restructure), ICANN has been working closely with stakeholders from all over the world to stimulate engagement in ICANN process. This has resulted in increased participation in ICANN constituencies from regions around the world, including the Middle East. Yet, there is more to be done to make ICANN engagement more effective and more global.

Under the current leadership of ICANN, internationalization of the organization and globalization of engagement is becoming a cornerstone of all initiatives going forward. The African community has taken the lead in developing a regional engagement strategy through a working group of community members that was put together following the ICANN meeting in Prague in June 2012. The strategy was concluded and presented few months later at the ICANN meeting in Toronto. While the implementation of the Africa strategy is underway, similar initiatives were launched in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

During the last few months of 2012, ICANN has had several meetings with Middle East stakeholders regarding participation in ICANN as well as ICANN engagement in the region. Such meetings took place in various venues including the Arab IGF meeting (Kuwait, 9-11 October 2012), ICANN 45<sup>th</sup> meeting (Toronto, 14-19 October 2012), and the 7<sup>th</sup> IGF meeting (Baku, 6-9 November 2012). Feedback received during those meetings demonstrated need to put more effort to enhance engagement with the Middle East community. There was also support for the notion of engagement strategies, and willingness to take part in developing a strategy for the Middle East.

In December 2012, ICANN called for the creation of a working group to develop ICANN engagement strategy for the Middle East, and invited ICANN community and constituency members to join this effort. Twenty two people expressed interest in joining the working group. They come from eleven countries and represent a variety of stakeholders, including governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and the academia. Annex 7.1 lists the members of the Middle East Strategy Working Group (MESWG), their affiliations, and countries they come from.

The working group's Terms of Reference have been to:

- Develop a three-year (2013-2016) regional engagement strategy for the Middle East that focuses on the needs and priorities of the region within the scope of ICANN's role;
- Identify specific strategic areas and accordingly the problems and challenges of each area and the corresponding recommendations and actions;
- Provide a preliminary plan of action including activities, timelines and priorities;
- Ensure a true multi-stakeholder approach in both the development of this strategy and its implementation;
- Work with ICANN on developing a one-year implementation plan.

## 2.2 Geographical Scope

The Middle East, as covered by ICANN’s Global Stakeholder Engagement, includes the following countries: United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

During the consultations that led to the creation of the working group, stakeholders from North Africa expressed interest to become part of this process, and noted that the strategy should address common issues across all Arab countries. Accordingly, the geographical scope of this strategy, shown in Figure 1, covers all 22 Arab countries as well as Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.



Figure 1 Middle East and Adjoining Countries

This group of countries falls within two different ICANN geographical regions (Africa and Asia Pacific), hence they are part of different regional structures such as APRALO and AFRALO for At-Large, and APTLD and AFTLD for country code top-level domains. They also fall within the scope of three Regional Internet Registries: RIPE NCC, AfriNIC and APNIC.

MESWG members noted that the geographical diversity of the Middle East region as defined in this context would represent a challenge not only in identifying a common ground to base this strategy on, but also in ensuring the ongoing and effective engagement from both ICANN and the community moving forward.

Furthermore, MESWG discussed the geographical term that would best describe the collection of countries catered by this strategy. There was a consensus that such a group of countries could be best described as “Middle East and Adjoining Countries”. However, for easier reference, the group agreed to continue to use the term “Middle East” throughout this document, with the understanding that it covers more countries.

## 2.3 The Region in Numbers

The current section summarizes statistics given in Table 3 in Section 7.3:

- The region's total population is 653,879,364; representing 9.32% of the world's population.
- The region's total Internet population is 178,283,126; representing 7.41% of the world's Internet population.
- Internet penetration in the region is 27.27%; world's Internet penetration is 34.3%.
- There are 16 root server instances in 9 different countries in the region.
- Total number of ccTLD domain names registered in the region is approximately 660,000 domains; more than half of this number is registered under one single ccTLD (.ir), and around 70% of it is registered under two ccTLDs, namely (.ir) and (.ae).
- Number of ccTLD registrations in the region is around 0.62% of the total number of ccTLD registration worldwide (currently around 105,000,000).
- Of the 25 countries in the region, 11 have IDN ccTLDs in the root.
- Total number of IDN ccTLD registrations is less than 10,000.
- Total number of new gTLD applications is 54; they come from 7 countries; 36 applications come from one country (UAE).
- Of the 54 new gTLD applications, 8 are IDN gTLDs.
- Number of new gTLD applications from the region is less than 0.03% of the total number of submitted applications (1,930).
- There are 6 ICANN accredited registrars in 5 different countries, out of 973 accredited registrars worldwide.
- 17 countries are represented in the GAC.
- 17 ccTLD operators are members of ccNSO.
- There are 11 At-large Structures in 8 different countries.
- There is one Board Director from the region.
- Only a few individuals from the region are participating actively in GNSO, ALAC, and SSAC.

The above summary demonstrates the following:

- Small number of ccTLD registrations; 1 domain name per 275 Internet users in the region versus 1 domain name per 23 Internet users worldwide.
- A relatively large number of IDN ccTLDs, yet the number of registrations under those IDN ccTLDs is very small.
- The number of new gTLD applications is not very indicative since there are about 30 applications from one applicant (radixregistry.com). On the other hand, the small number of ICANN accredited registrars reflects the lack of interest and/or awareness of the domain name business.
- Lack of participation in the different constituencies of ICANN; despite the relatively high number of GAC and ccNSO members from the region, only few attend regularly and even fewer participate actively in there.